

Fact Sheet

Children & Family Services Review

Background:

North Dakota implemented the federal Adoption Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements in August 1999 after enabling legislation was passed by the state legislature. The law is intended to assure that children do not languish in foster care, and that their safety and wellbeing are protected. Implementing, ASFA has required a concerted collaborative effort involving the courts, county social services, states attorneys, tribes, department staff and others.

To assure that states are achieving the outcomes outlined in ASFA, federal officials have designed the Children and Family Services Review. In 2001, North Dakota and 16 other states are scheduled to participate in the first round of this review process. North Dakota's review is set for September 2001.

What is the purpose of the review?

The new review process is intended to assess whether services for children and family conform to the North Dakota Child and Family State Plan requirements and are achieving desired outcomes.

Who is involved in this review process?

Characterized as a partnership to achieve better results for children and families who are involved in the public child welfare system, the review involves federal, state, and local officials.

The 25-member review team will include representatives from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Children's Bureau, federal regional offices, peers from other state child welfare programs, and the state. About half of the reviewers will be from North Dakota. This 12-member state level review team is being formed now. Once finalized, it may include representatives such as private agencies, counties, the state, tribes, the Division of Juvenile Services, the foster parent community, regional supervisors, and the Children and Family Training Center at the University of North Dakota.

What is different about this review?

Previous child welfare program reviews focused on the accuracy and completeness of case file documentation. The new Children and Family Services Review examines the results that children and family services programs achieve. Paul Ronningen, director of the state's Children and Families Services Division said, the process has been piloted in a few states, and participants have described it as positive, thorough, and collaborative.

What are the steps in the review process?

North Dakota is completing a self-assessment provided by the Children's Bureau. The assessment will help federal officials and others on the review team understand how child welfare services are provided in North Dakota.

In March, the state will receive a profile summarizing the foster care and child protective services data it sends to federal officials. The state will have an opportunity to respond to the profile.

This spring, state and federal officials will determine the three review sites. Then, in September 2001, the review team will arrive and hold an entrance interview. The team will break up into smaller groups to conduct focus groups, case reviews, and interviews with "partners" such as the courts, families, children, caseworkers, foster parents, service providers, and others. The 30-50 cases reviewed during the on-site visit will be selected randomly.

After the information gathering stage is completed, the team will hold an exit interview. The Children's Bureau will make a decision within 30 days of the review whether the state is in substantial conformity. Because the review is constructive and collaborative, any state that does not meet ASFA outcome standards will have an opportunity to address concerns by developing a program improvement plan with the federal Administration for Children and Families before any penalty would be assessed. A state in this situation would participate in a review process in two years. States in substantial compliance will participate in reviews every five years. **Over→**

What does the review team evaluate?

Reviewers will look at seven outcomes and seven systemic factors.

Outcomes:

Safety

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Permanency

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Child and Family Well-Being

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Systemic Factors:

The seven systemic factors considered essential to deliver high quality services include:

- Statewide information system
- Case review system
- Quality assurance system
- Staff training
- Array of services
- Agency responsiveness
- Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention

Determination of substantial conformity:

Determination of substantial conformity are made separately for each of the seven outcomes and the seven system factors under review. A state may be determined to be in substantial conformity on one or more of the outcomes or system factors and not in substantial conformity on the others. Program improvement plans and penalties cover only those areas determined not to be in substantial conformity.

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